



CHADWICK (J.R.)

IN MEMORIAM.

FORDYCE BARKER, M.D., LL.D.

BY

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BOSTON.



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James Fairbanks
George Barker

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BY JAMES R. CHADWICK, M.D.,
Boston.

OUR Society is called upon this year to lament the loss of three of its founders, foremost among whom in the interest he testified to this Society and in the affections of its Fellows is unquestionably its first president, the subject of this sketch.

Fordyce Barker, born at Wilton, Maine, on May 2, 1818, was the second son of Dr. John Barker, who served in the War of 1812, and Phoebe Abbott Barker. He died at his residence, 24 East Thirty-eighth Street, New York, on May 30, 1891, after several years of failing powers. His ancestor came to this country in 1640, and settled at Rowley, Massachusetts; the family subsequently moved to Maine, where Fordyce was born, while Maine was still a province of Massachusetts. He prepared for college under the tuition of the Rev. Charles Freeman, of Limerick, Maine, and entered Bowdoin College in 1833, graduating in 1837, in the same class as Governor John A. Andrew. One of his surviving classmates writes me that he was then "a kind, courteous, and gentlemanly person, and esteemed a jolly good fellow. During his college course he was not distinguished as a scholar, nor was he a great reader of books, nor did he manifest a fondness for literature or science for the love of them.

He appeared impatient of study, and the attainment of knowledge by the slow and laborious steps necessary to others he did not reach. His perceptions were quick, and his acquirements were made apparently intuitively and at a glance. His prevailing characteristic was his fondness for society." This picture of the youth will be recognized as fitting the grown man, but hardly presages the eminence among the great of the land to which he ultimately attained. I remember his coming to my house in Boston, *en route* to New York, on the night after he had entertained his classmates at dinner in Brunswick, Me., on June 24, 1887, on the fiftieth anniversary of their graduation. He told me that there had been twelve members present of sixty who had been connected with the class, and that twenty-two had been reported living, a truly remarkable longevity even for classes of that early date.

From 1838 to 1840 Fordyce Barker was studying medicine in Boston, in the office of Dr. Henry I. Bowditch, and in the U. S. Marine Hospital in the neighboring town of Chelsea with Dr. Charles H. Stedman, the first resident physician of that institution. An episode of those days, that manifests the unfailing kindness of Dr. Barker's heart, has been related to me by Dr. C. E. Stedman, a son of the above. One day, when Dr. Barker was witnessing the operations at the Massachusetts General Hospital, the surgeon operating did some specially cruel thing to a patient (this was before the days of anæsthesia). Dr. Barker, unable to retain his indignation, muttered "d—d old brute" loud enough to be heard by the operator. Whereupon the surgeon wrote a letter to Dr. Stedman, complaining of the base conduct of his student. The next day Dr. Stedman entered the Dispensary of the Hospital, where Barker was occupied, and said gravely, "Mister Barker, here is a letter demanding your serious consideration," handing him the note. He was confounded by the manner of his preceptor and by the signature of the letter; but, looking up to the retreating figure, he saw, as he said, "the laugh curling up behind the doctor's ears," and felt that

he was not to be severely punished. In fact he never heard of it again.

Barker was greatly endeared to Dr. Stedman by his high spirits and his musical tastes, so that a firm friendship was formed between master and pupil, which was actively maintained until the death of the former, in 1866.

In 1841 Dr. Barker took his medical degree at Bowdoin Medical College; immediately after which, having inherited a tendency to pulmonary disease, he established himself in Norwich, Conn., by the advice of Dr. Bowditch. His success in practice was immediate and phenomenal considering his youth, but his interests were not confined to his profession. During the Harrison campaign he engaged in politics and stumped the State in the interest of the Whig party, making a speech in a different town every night for three months, as I remember his telling me. When at Bowdoin he had been a member of the college band, and played several instruments. He had also a very sweet tenor voice, which led to his often singing in the church of Bishop Clark, now of Rhode Island, when the latter was rector in Boston. He also composed a number of melodies and a Fast-day anthem.

On September 14, 1844, Dr. Barker was married at Harrisburg, Pa., to Miss Elizabeth Lee Dwight, a native of Springfield, Mass., and on October 1st sailed with his young wife from New York for Havre, France, to carry out the plan formulated for him by Dr. Bowditch, of obtaining a degree from the Paris University.

During the following winter Dr. Barker attended the Paris hospitals most assiduously, incidentally winning the life-long friendships of many of his distinguished teachers, Baron Dubois, Trousseau, Sir Joseph Oliffe, Chomel, and others. While travelling in the summer of 1845, before he had been able to complete his examinations for a degree, he was suddenly summoned home by the illness of a near relative. He subsequently, however, received the degree through the friendly offices of Trousseau and his other friends in the

Faculty. His practice soon exceeded the limits of the town of Norwich, and his growing fame led him to be elected Professor of Obstetrics in the Bowdoin Medical College, which he held but one year, as the interruptions to his practice proved too disadvantageous. His address on "Some Forms of Disease of the Cervix Uteri," as President of the Connecticut Medical Society, delivered in May, 1848, attracted wide attention, and caused him to be invited soon after, by Prof. C. F. Gilman and Dr. Willard Parker, to enter the Faculty of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New York. His removal to New York was, however, postponed until March, 1850; soon after which, together with Drs. Horace Green, Abraham L. Cox, and R. Ogden Doremus, he became one of the incorporators of the New York Medical College, located on East Thirteenth Street, filling the chair of obstetrics. It was while lecturing in this school that he strained his voice and ever after labored under the disadvantage of having only a hoarse whisper at his command, due to partial paralysis of one of the vocal cords. This misfortune would have turned any man of less determination from a public career, but he persevered in his lecturing and public speaking to the end of his life, always making himself heard, and causing his auditors to forget the imperfections of his voice by the charm of his eloquence and the purity of his diction.

In 1854 he was appointed Obstetric Physician to Bellevue Hospital; and in 1861, together with Drs. Isaac E. Taylor, James R. Wood, Lewis A. Sayre, George T. Elliott, Alexander A. Mott, and Benjamin McCreedy, all on the staff of the Bellevue Hospital, he obtained a charter for the "Bellevue Hospital Medical College," and invited Drs. Frank H. Hamilton, Austin Flint, Austin Flint, Jr., and R. Ogden Doremus, to join with them in the establishment of the college. In this Faculty Dr. Barker filled the chair of Obstetrics and Diseases of Women until his death, although for the past few years he had been unable to lecture, owing to physical weakness.

From his advent in New York Dr. Barker secured the confidence not only of the leading families but of his medical *confrères*, so that he was consulted by patients from all parts of the country. Though his fame was widest as an obstetrician, his knowledge in all branches of medicine was extensive and accurate, and he never ceased to practise as a general physician. He had a sanguine disposition, a genial manner, and impressive presence, so that he inspired confidence wherever he went. His intuitions were so quick and so sure, his capacity for acquiring knowledge without labor so great, his fertility of resource so unbounded, that he never failed to instil into his patient that most important of all therapeutic measures—*hope*. Wisdom he had to a higher degree than any man I ever knew; and common sense; and tact, which may be defined as “applied wisdom”—wisdom exercised in social life.

One of his numerous letters to me, which I have been re-perusing, recalls so striking an instance of his sagacity and ingenuity that I will venture to relate the case which called it forth. In 1879 I was consulted by a lady from New Bedford, aged thirty-three years, who had had a dead-born child four years before, and since that time four miscarriages. She was very anxious to have a living child. I found her to be perfectly healthy in every respect, except for a retroversion and a laceration of the perineum through the sphincter. I corrected the misplacement, and she immediately conceived, and miscarried again at the usual period. I then restored the perineum, and the same result followed. Finding no further morbid condition, and being at the end of my resources, I sent her to Dr. Barker for an opinion, which he rendered as follows: “I can find no local cause for her repeated miscarriages. The uterus is not atrophied, and there is very trivial displacement. My conviction is that the cause is to be sought in a constitutional perversion of nerve-force after conception—that is, that conception is not followed by increased activity of the generative functions, but by in-

creased activity of the nutritive and assimilative functions and marked increase of the arterial tension. What think you of this view?" The view struck me as fanciful, which I did not hesitate to express, with the freedom of intimacy, as follows: "Your conclusion was such as I expected from your genius and imagination." Acting upon his theory, however, he prescribed a strict milk diet and frequent bleedings (the woman was quite stout and florid) during the critical period. The treatment was strictly followed by me, with the result that she went to full term and was delivered of a living child. Acting upon the same theory, I have twice since succeeded in carrying women in similar conditions to full terms.

While Dr. Barker was deservedly trusted in all branches of medical practice, it was in the branch of obstetrics that he acquired the most fame and his most lasting work. He did not, however, enter into the domain of surgery, transferring to others all cases requiring the use of the knife. While a frequent contributor to current medical literature, his chief work was *The Puerperal Diseases*, first published in New York in January, 1874, which rapidly ran through many editions, and was translated into French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Russian. His clinical portrayals of these diseases in this volume will probably never be surpassed, though his views of the pathology and therapeutics have been already largely controverted by the phenomenal advances of the germ-theory of disease in the last few years.

Dr. Barker's many-sidedness caused him to be elected to many hospitals and societies. He was physician to Bellevue Hospital, and consulting physician to the Nursery and Child's Hospital, St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Cancer Hospital, and the Woman's Hospital. He was a member of the New York Academy of Medicine, of which he was president from 1879 to 1885, of the New York County Medical Society, of the New York Obstetrical Society, of the New York Pathological Society, of the New York Medical and Surgical Society, of the Medico-legal Society, of the

Medical Society of the State of New York, of which he was at one time president, and of the American Gynecological Society, of which he was the first president and had the unique distinction of reëlection to a second term. He was Honorary Fellow of the Royal Medical Society of Athens, of the Obstetrical Societies of London and Edinburgh, and of the British Medical Association. He was a member of the Obstetrical Societies of Philadelphia and Louisville, Ky., of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, and of the Medical Society of London. Outside of medicine he was a member of the American Geographical and Statistical Society in New York, of the Academy of Design, of the American Bible Society, of the New York Historical Society, and of the Century and other Clubs. He was a communicant of St. Thomas's Church (Episcopal), New York City. He received many honorary titles: on June 20, 1878, the degree of LL.D. from Columbia College; on April 17, 1884, LL.D. from the University of Edinburgh at its tercentenary celebration; on June 24, 1887, LL.D. from Bowdoin College, on the fiftieth anniversary of his graduation; on August 10, 1888, LL.D. from Glasgow University. He was invited to attend the seven hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the University of Bologna to receive a fifth LL.D. in 1888, but was unable to avail himself of the invitation.

This Society will not need to be reminded how unanimous was his election to be our first president, and how pointedly we expressed our appreciation of his wise and conciliatory conduct in office by reëlecting him to a second term. I may tell you what you may have only surmised, that the very existence of the Society is largely due to the enthusiastic manner in which he received my first proposition for its foundation; and the success which attended its early and critical years was mainly attributable to his sagacity and knowledge of men. Every step in our early career was subjected to a rigid criticism in his library, and the ultimate policy modelled upon the principles that he laid down.

These early conferences cemented a close intimacy, despite the disparity of our ages, which endured unabated in fervor to the end of his life. For fifteen years his house has been my home in New York, in which, whether bidden or unbidden, I have invariably been welcomed by his cordial smile and eager handshake, and by the grace and sweetness of his accomplished wife. As one of his many friends, I cannot let pass this opportunity of testifying to his many kindly offices, to his warmth of heart, and to his sacrifice of self for those of whom he was fond. Last, but by no means least in the enumeration of the qualities which made him a power in the land, was the exuberance of his social nature. He never seemed so happy or so brilliant as when extending to his professional brethren and to the medical and literary celebrities from abroad the hospitalities of his princely mansion. His annual trips to Europe, extending over a period of more than thirty years, made him a prominent figure in the social life of Europe; he was on terms of intimacy with Dickens, Thackeray, and other literary celebrities; the hospitalities then received were repaid when any of his hosts visited this country. His receptions given to Sir Spencer Wells, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, to the American Gynecological Society, will long be remembered among the brilliant events of New York life during the last half-century. Lord Houghton, Lord Dunraven, Sir Lyon Playfair, the Princess Henriette, Geheimrath von Esmarch, and many others partook of his royal hospitality.

We all of us feel that we have lost our best friend, that our Society has lost its most enthusiastic Fellow, its most lucid debater; that the profession of New York has lost its most conspicuous and best-loved member.

